



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 7 January 2020

by M Allen BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 4 February 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/W/19/3234208

Lower Farm, Bell Lane, Brookmans Park, Hatfield AL9 7AY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr P Brennan against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2019/0324/FULL, dated 7 February 2019, was refused by notice dated 21 June 2019.
 - The development proposed is the change of use and conversion of existing single storey redundant farm building to form 2no. dwellings, new vehicular access and crossover.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The Council's second reason for refusal refers to a lack of information in respect of protected species, specifically bats. The appellant has submitted additional information with the appeal and the Council is now satisfied that this matter has been satisfactorily addressed. Based on what I have seen, I agree. As such, I have confined my consideration to the remaining reason for refusal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues raised in this case are the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the building, together with the setting of the nearby Grade II listed building, Lower Farm Farmhouse.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises an existing part single-storey, part two-storey height former farm building, with surrounding outdoor areas and a number of other associated buildings. The site is currently accessed via an existing gated access leading off the nearby road, Bell Lane.
5. Adjacent, and to the east, is an existing dwelling, Lower Farm, a Grade II listed building. The listing description identifies that the significance of this designated heritage asset lies, in part, in it being a farmhouse, with a front range dating from around 1600 and a further back range dating from the 17th Century. I observed that the significance of the dwelling is also derived in part from the open and expansive curtilage, within which the appeal building lies.

There were also views of the site from the nearby road, where the appeal building has a clear visual association with the farmhouse.

6. The conversion scheme proposes to retain the east elevation of the outbuilding, with no new openings proposed and those that exist currently, retained. To the west elevation, new fenestration is proposed. To the two-storey high element of the building, a number of square windows are proposed. These would not replicate any of the openings that are currently present on the building and they would introduce more modern elements, which I consider would be at odds with its current distinctly uncomplicated appearance. As such, rather than improving the appearance of the blank brickwork, they would appear as unsympathetic additions to the building.
7. To the single-storey part of the building, new glazed panels are proposed which, for the most part, utilise the existing openings, as well as the introduction of a doorway. Given that flat-headed openings are already present on this elevation, of the same scale as the glazing that is proposed, this element of the scheme would not have a harmful effect on the existing building. A number of rooflights are also proposed to the roof plane above this elevation, serving the proposed bedrooms. However, there are seven rooflights proposed, where currently there are none. These would, in my view, result in a cluttered appearance, detracting from the simple form and elevations of the building.
8. The proposals include the provision of a new boundary between the farmhouse and the outbuilding. This would have the effect of severing the outbuilding from the curtilage of the farmhouse and, as a consequence, it would curtail part of the expansive curtilage. Visually, this would in my view, diminish the attractiveness of the listed building. In views from the public realm, the building would also appear as a separate entity from the farmhouse, rather than as an associated building. I consider that this would harm the significance of the farmhouse as a designated heritage asset. I note that the appellant suggests that the precise details of boundary treatments, together with surfacing, would be controlled by planning condition. However, this would only control the detail of such boundary treatment and it is my view that any boundary which separates the outbuilding from the farmhouse, would highlight a visual separation, harming the listed buildings significance. As such, this would not overcome the harm I identify.
9. Accordingly, the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the building, together with the setting of the nearby Grade II listed building, Lower Farm Farmhouse. Thus, the scheme conflicts with policies D1 and D2 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan (2005) and policies SP9 and SADM15 of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission August 2016. Together, and amongst other things, these policies seek to ensure development is of a high quality, that development respects the character of an area, that development results in attractive forms & elevations and that development respects the character, appearance and setting of designated heritage assets. The scheme would also conflict with the detailed guidance of the document "Supplementary Design Guidance" (2005), as well as the design aims of the National Planning Policy Framework.
10. In failing to preserve the setting of the listed building, I find that the scheme would result in less than substantial harm to a designated heritage asset. As

required by paragraph 196 of the Framework, I have had regard to the limited public benefits of the proposed development identified, particularly in this case the provision of additional housing and economic benefits both during and after construction. However, given the scale of the scheme for two dwellings, any such benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the harm that I have identified.

Other Matters

11. The Council highlight that it is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. However, paragraph 11(d)(i) of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) indicates that the relevant policies of the development plan will not be out-of-date where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusing the development proposed. These include policies in relation to protecting designated heritage assets. As such, the provisions of paragraph 11 of the Framework are not a reason for granting permission in this case.
12. The appellant contends that benefits of the scheme are the Council considering the scheme to not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the location having access to services, the proposed dwellings being well-appointed and spacious, as well as there being sufficient car parking proposed. Whilst these matters are noted, they refer to a lack of harm, rather than to benefits of the scheme. There is also no evidence before me that the scheme would impact on the viability of the farmhouse. As such, these matters have little bearing on my decision.
13. There is reference to redevelopment taking place on the adjoining site, which it is contended was considered to not harm the setting of the listed building. Whilst this is noted, the development proposed is clearly unconnected from the adjoining site. This matter does not therefore have any direct relevant to the scheme that is before me and I have judged the appeal scheme on its own merits.

Conclusion

14. Therefore, for the reasons given and having regard to all matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Martin Allen

INSPECTOR